

Fidelity of Implementation Considerations for Bringing Pre-K Practices to Scale

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Fidelity of implementation is the extent to which an intervention, or, approach is used as it was intended or designed. To consider whether a practice has been implemented with fidelity, the practice must be clearly defined. The definition of the practice should address explicit expectations for implementation and should provide a complete description of what the practice will look like when implemented as intended. By clearly defining a practice or intervention, expectations are clarified, thus building an understanding of what needs to be accomplished to improve practice. In most cases, a rubric is used to guide reflections on practice and to document levels of fidelity.

Fidelity is important for several reasons. First, it provides guidelines for “taking stock” of where the practice is so that goals for improvement can be set. Second, fidelity measures document a project's needs and guide planning for resources and support. Third, fidelity data, collected at various points during implementation, enables documentation of change over time. Finally, information on levels of implementation fidelity is essential for accurate interpretation of evaluation results and research findings. For example, if an intervention was not successful with children in one classroom, fidelity indices can be examined to determine whether the teacher implemented the intervention as it was intended. Alternatively, the implementation coach may not have provided the teacher with the needed support for its full implementation. Reflecting on fidelity within the context of actual instruction, provides basic insight into why and how a given outcome was reached.

Because circumstances, conditions, and needs vary across states, regions, districts, and sites, expectations for implementation also vary. This means that in establishing fidelity, attention must be given to flexibility. While combining flexibility with fidelity may seem oxymoronic, it is critical when complex practices are brought to scale across multiple settings and differing sites. Given the realities of early child care today with multiple governmental, fiscal, and organizational agencies involved and multiple settings for service delivery (e.g., public schools, Head Start, center-based, and family-based) combining some level of flexibility with fidelity is essential to any scale-up of pre-k RTI.

The key to fidelity with flexibility is to identify anchors of practice that must be in place, while simultaneously identifying "flex-points" where the practice can be adapted for individual settings. Thus, an anchor for RTI with pre-k is the use of high-quality, evidence-based Tier 1 curricula aligned with learning standards to promote learning for all children; the flexibility comes with the specific choice of the curriculum used. Within Tier II, the use of evidence-based interventions for children who need additional support for early literacy must be in place; but the specific intervention used can vary depending on circumstances, conditions, and needs. Below is an example of a program rubric for the implementation of RTI in pre-k settings. This rubric is intended as a guide for planning at the *program* level. While fidelity rubrics are also important at the classroom level; these must be tailored to the specific pre-k RTI expectations for classroom practices and so these must be created for each model or approach.

[insert program rubric RTI with pre-k Adapted with permission from authors.]

Reference: Coleman, M.R., Gillis, M., West, T. (in press). Response to intervention pre-k: Emerging practices, remaining challenges. *Exceptionality*, 17(3).]